

Behind the curtain

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I turned over and groaned inwardly. It was 6.30 am, Monday, and still dark. I had been woken, as usual, by the sound of Mrs Brandt opening her curtains. This happens every morning, and I should be used to it by now, but it always sets me on edge. The Brandts live in the apartment below and Mrs Brandt has a routine that is as regular as clockwork. It doesn't bother my wife Sonia at all, but I can distinguish between a dozen different types of clattering. Some mornings Mrs Brandt makes an energetic crashing sound, throwing the curtains back as if she's already angry. Other times it is just a quick parting of the fabric but even then, I hear the rings rattling along the pole. The only time I get any peace is when the Brandts visit their daughter in Austria for two weeks in July.

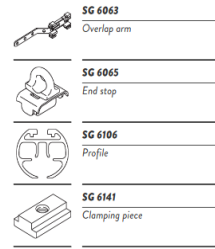
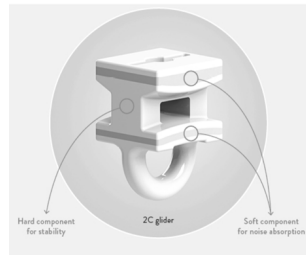
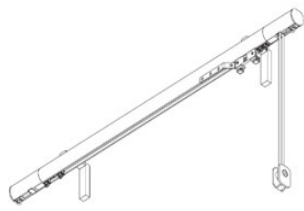
I don't need to be up for another half an hour, but once I hear the curtains go, that's it, I'm awake. On this particular morning I lay back on the pillows and thought about the week ahead. I work at an aluminium extrusion plant, just half a mile down the road. Unlike my colleagues on the factory floor, I have an office job and a fancy title: Director of Marketing, Alexander P. Weber. My role is to find new uses for aluminium section. It's not what I was trained for, but now the war is over I have a lot of freedom, and there are many new materials to work with.

I need to rewrite the company's mission statement and come up with some new slogans: aluminium can revolutionise your day, small steps make a big difference, life is good when things run smoothly, or maybe something snappier, If you can, Al Can? I mulled over the options. If there was one thing that would improve *my* life it would be to sleep a little longer in the morning. What if the Brandts could open their curtains and greet the day in silence? What if their curtains travelled quietly along a well-designed track?

By then it really was time to get up. Sonia was in the kitchen, stirring the porridge. She looked up: 'Breakfast is almost ready' she said, 'and the coffee is on the table'. Sometimes she treats me like the child she never had. I knew, before I spoke, that she'd dismiss my idea out of hand, but I carried on anyway. 'What about silent curtains? Wouldn't that improve peoples' lives?' Sonia turned around and smiled indulgently. 'What do you mean' she said. 'I mean if we didn't hear the Brandts opening their curtains every morning, we'd get a better night's sleep'. Sonia put the bowl of steaming porridge down on the table. 'Alex, you come up with such crazy suggestions. Just forget about the Brandts'.

Sonia was right more often than I care to admit but this time I was on to something. If I could produce a silent curtain, using some combination of our aluminium track and one of these new plastics, we'd make a fortune, I was sure of it.

I parked my bicycle in the basement and went up to my office on the third floor. I shut the door so that I could work undisturbed. By mid-day I had sketched a prototype and made a few enquiries. Nylon gliders seemed to be an option. I usually keep my thoughts to myself, but this time I was so excited that I decided to show Klaus what I'd come up with.



Klaus is my boss. He is a shrewd businessman and he knows his way around the world. He studied the sheaf of sketches that I laid out on the table. 'That's clever Alex, very clever' he said. I let him keep the drawings to take a closer look.

Well, that was the last we saw of Klaus. From what I've learned, it took him no time at all to patent my idea, do a deal with our managing director and come up with a name for his new company, 'Silent Gliss'. Klaus moved back to his home town of Bern and as they say, the rest is history. Thankfully the Brandts upgraded their curtain track just a few years later, and although Sonia and I made no money from my invention, we sleep well and we sleep longer than we did before.

p.s. this is fiction!